

D.E.A. / Drugs and Drug Enforcement

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Story of Spies, Stolen Arms and Drugs

By Bill Wallace
Chronicle Correspondent

Fresno

A federal judge here began hearing testimony yesterday in a case involving spies, drug-dealers, gunrunners and a shadowy group known to its own members as "The Company."

The defendants in the case, former Air Force Master Sergeant **Larry Earl Bryant** and inventor **Alvin Snaper**, are accused of stealing specialized military equipment — some of which is classified — from the top security U.S. Naval Weapons Station at China Lake in the Mojave Desert.

Bryant was indicted on four counts of receiving embezzled property, two counts of conspiracy and one count of embezzlement. Snaper was accused of two counts of conspiracy, one count of embezzlement and one count of receiving embezzled property.

Both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges. U.S. District Judge Edward Dean Price is hearing the case without a jury, and the trial is expected to last about two weeks.

Taken from the base were nine infrared sniperscopes, a television camera for taking pictures in darkness, 1500 rounds of small arms tracer ammunition for night combat, a five-foot remote-control helicopter, and secret components

from the radar unit of a Sidewinder guided missile.

Federal agents say some of the stolen equipment was going to be used to make electronic equipment for drug smugglers and some was traded to drug suppliers in Colombia for marijuana.

According to documents filed in the case, Bryant, 42, is a retired Air Force master sergeant from St. Louis, Mo., who once worked at China Lake developing devices to counter foreign radar systems. Snaper was described as an inventor from Las Vegas.

"The Company," the drug-smuggling organization to which police say Bryant and Snaper belong, apparently took its name from jargon for the CIA.

The organization reputedly has about 300 members, many of them former military men or ex-police officers, and nearly \$30 million worth of assets, including planes, ships and real estate.

Federal drug agents say the organization has imported billions of dollars worth of narcotics from Latin America, and also is involved in gunrunning and mercenary operations.

Twenty-five reputed members of the group were indicted by the federal grand jury in Fresno last year on charges ranging from importing narcotics for sale to stealing classified armaments. The indictment did not name "The Company" itself, however.

Snaper and Bryant are the first defendants to stand trial on the charges in the Fresno indictment.

According to the indictment, Larry Bryant and several other men police say are associated with "The Company" took the military equipment from China Lake between January and October of 1979.

Five of the nightscopes were ultimately discovered in Snaper's garage in Las Vegas, and another one turned up when police raided a Lexington, Ky., warehouse Bradley F. Bryant had rented under a pseudonym.

Bradley Bryant is Larry Bryant's cousin and a man police say is one of the ringleaders of "The Company." He is being held in lieu of \$1 million bond at a prison in Elgin, Ill., awaiting trial on federal charges of selling \$250,000 worth of marijuana to undercover narcotics agents.

A sixth scope was found in the wreckage of a plane that crashed off the coast of Colombia. Authorities say the plane was on a drug-smuggling mission when it crashed.

The other three scopes disappeared entirely, as have the radar components and the remote-controlled helicopter.

There have been several recent incidents apparently connected with the case.

Last month, **Andrew Carter Thornton II**, one of the men who has pleaded guilty in the Fresno case, was shot two times in the chest at point-blank range by an

unknown assailant as he walked out of a restaurant in Lexington, Ky.

Thornton, a former narcotics officer, survived — but only because he was wearing a bulletproof vest.

There have been no arrests in the shooting, and police say they have no suspects.

In January, **Gene Berry**, a state prosecutor in Charlotte Harbor, Fla., was shot to death as he answered his door. Earlier this month, police arrested **Bonnie Kelly** as Berry's murderer.

Kelly's husband, **Wallace McClure (Mike) Kelly**, is a suspected member of "The Company" who pleaded guilty in the Fresno case last month. Charlotte County Sheriff **Glenn Saper** said the Berry slaying, while not related to the China Lake thefts, was a "Company" assassination, accomplished with the help of the group's members.

Florida law enforcement officials say that **Charles V. Harrelson**, a convicted slayer indicted this month for the 1979 murder of U.S. District Judge **John H. Wood** in El Paso, is also a member of "The Company," and a close associate of **Wallace Kelly**.

Police said **Jamiel (Jimmy) Chagra**, a convicted drug dealer who is an indicted co-conspirator in the Wood assassination case, once hired **Bradley Bryant's** private security firm — staffed by reputed members of "The Company" — as a bodyguard service.

Former Narcotics Officer Parachutes Out of Plane, Dies With 77 Pounds of Cocaine

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—A former narcotics officer once linked to a drug ring with South American connections set his plane on automatic pilot before parachuting to his death with 77 pounds of cocaine, officials said Thursday.

The FBI and agents of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration joined an investigation in which authorities were trying to trace ownership of the plane, which crashed Wednesday in rugged North Carolina hills 60 miles south of Knoxville.

The plane had been sold Monday to a company that apparently does not exist, a broker said.

Authorities said that a key found on the body of Andrew Carter Thornton II, 40, originally from Paris, Ky., had the same identification numbers as the unmanned aircraft that went down about 1:15 a.m. Wednesday.

Thornton was found lying on top of his unopened main chute with his reserve chute deployed nearby. The coroner said he suffered a broken neck.

Federal Aviation Administration investigator Robert Lash said authorities believe that Thornton used the plane to bring \$14 million worth of cocaine into the country. FAA spokesman Roger Myers in

Atlanta said that the twin-engine Cessna was capable of reaching the Tennessee-North Carolina area from South America.

Drug smuggling in the area has increased recently as federal authorities tighten drug enforcement along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Light planes equipped with additional fuel tanks can make a Colombia-Tennessee flight with ease, DEA agent Tony Acri said in Atlanta.

Thornton was known to be an accomplished parachutist and pilot. He served in the Army in the 101st Airborne Division. Between 1968 and 1977, he was a police officer in Lexington, Ky., and spent three years in the narcotics division. He quit after obtaining a law degree from the University of Kentucky.

In 1981, he was indicted in California for allegedly flying a plane to South America for a reputed drug ring known as "The Company." The charges were reduced to a misdemeanor marijuana count, to which he pleaded no contest in 1982. He was paroled after serving five months in prison, and his license was suspended by the Kentucky Bar Assn.

"I'm glad his parachute didn't open. I hope he got a hell of a high out of that (cocaine)," said Brian

Leighton, an assistant U.S. attorney in Fresno, Calif., who prosecuted Thornton on the marijuana trafficking charge.

In 1981, Thornton was among 25 men accused in Fresno in a theft of weapons from the China Lake Naval Weapons Center and of conspiring to smuggle 1,000 pounds of marijuana into the United States.

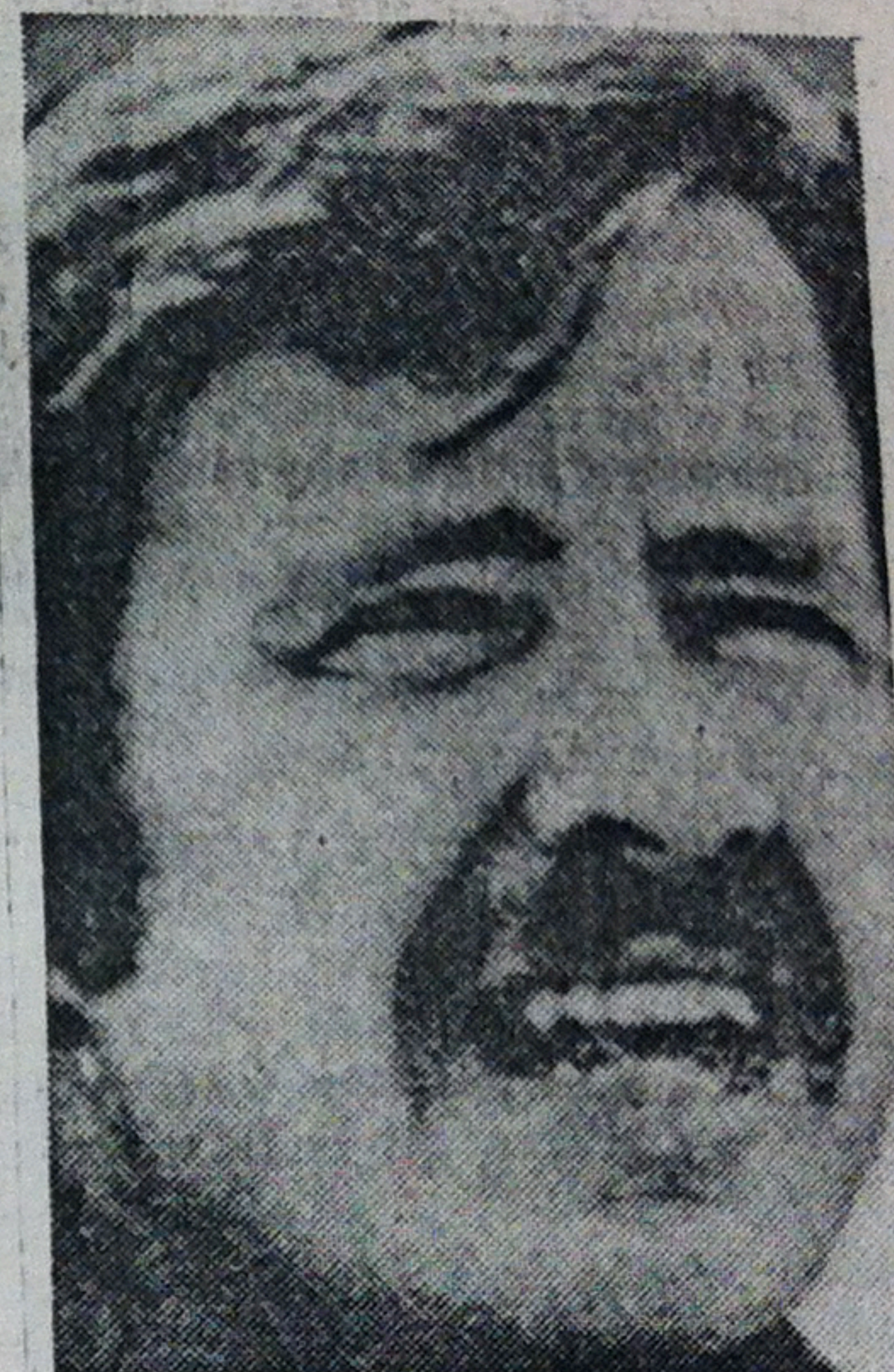
Thornton was not charged in the China Lake weapons case but was indicted in Fresno on one count of conspiracy to import a controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance.

Thornton left California after pleading not guilty and was arrested as a fugitive in North Carolina, wearing a bulletproof vest and carrying a pistol.

He pleaded no contest in Fresno to a misdemeanor drug charge, and the felony charges were dropped. In June, 1982, he was sentenced to six months in prison, fined \$500 and placed on probation for five years. He served five months before release.

On Thursday, Acri said that the DEA had not been tracking Thornton's plane before the wreck.

The aircraft was "very clean. There was no luggage, shaving kits or anything to indicate anybody



Associated Press

Andrew Carter Thornton II

had been in it," said Charles Fouts, an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

Fouts said that the FAA's last registry of the plane was with Opex Aviation Inc. of Santa Paula, Calif. But Graham Butler, an Opex officer, said that the plane had been sold two months ago.

Airplane broker Ron Schmidt of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., said that he sold the Cessna 404 Monday to a company he identified as Key Air of Miami. But no Key Air is listed in the Miami telephone directory.

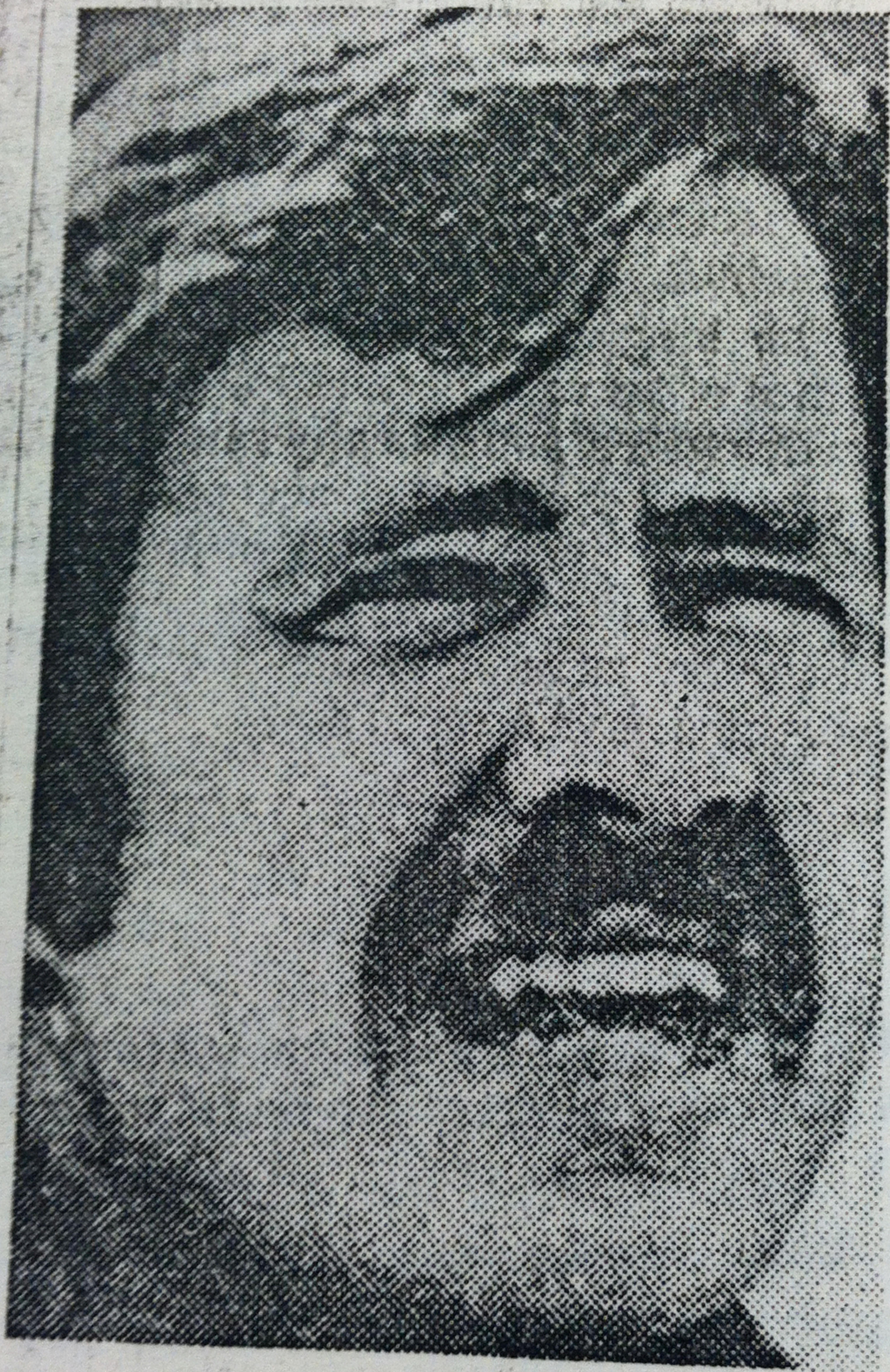
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NORIEGA INTO THE NINETIES

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Panama City

If you're waiting for the next coup in Panama, you're most likely waiting in vain. It will take time for the element of surprise to be a factor in any coup plot, and before any Panamanian opposition trusts the United States' blowy rhetoric. While Major Moises Giroldi had guns trained on General Noriega on October 3, while American helicopters hovered over the Comandancia, waiting to snatch the General off the roof, while Noriega was being herded into a truck, while U.S. troops watched the whole thing from the distance of a Bo Jackson home run, the General somehow faced Giroldi down, as Giroldi's communiqué to U.S. General Marc Cisneros stating that he didn't want Noriega extradited to the United States indicates. Meanwhile, the Battalion 2,000, an elite brigade of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), was roaring down the Transistmica, the "third road," to the Comandancia. "Roaring" may be the wrong word, as some sources say they were taking their time, out of worry that the U.S. might change its mind and commit troops.

It's not true that Noriega opened his shirt to Giroldi's trained guns and said "¡Matame, Giroldi... si tienes cojones!" (Kill me, Giroldi... if you have the balls!), but no one doubts it. He is a killer, the real thing—he shot Giroldi personally. He has nothing in common with, say, "the poet" Daniel Ortega, who, however noxious his rhetoric, always looks like a high school physics nerd who's too fond of guns. Whether due to Noriega's innate bravado or the fact that the General is often blitzed—Stolichnaya in the day, Old Parr at night—to the point where one associate describes him as functional about an hour a day, *cojones* is the operative word here, and the man is hung like a belfry. But this man the administration describes as a "thug" is also a formidable autodidact. Other

tyrants express admiration for history's dictators: Noriega studies them; he confides to friends that he considers himself the avatar of Genghis Khan. Any attempt at political change that does not involve at least Noriega's exile is a pipe dream.

Certainly the most un-Panamanian person in Panama, the General knows his people inside-out. Their politeness is exquisite and excessive—people stop their cars in the inner city to allow kids to continue their soccer games, not vice-versa. When Panamanians rallied in March 1988, one man, caught up in the mêlée when the Doberman brigade of the PDF brought out the truncheons and birdshot, made an outraged plea to an American camera crew to (please) come see the scratches on his car. Exactly what went on inside the Comandancia last October will remain a mystery. Weird things happened: Giroldi allowed Noriega to make a telephone call to his mistress, Vicky Amado, and it was she who sent the Battalion 2,000

to the General's rescue. Other than that, all's blurry, but to understand the mix of deference and stark fear that kept Giroldi from shooting Noriega would be to understand much of the Panamanian character and the Panamanian predicament.

Combining the drug trade, international capitalism, international Communism, and a history of U.S.-sponsored military buildup, this is unlike any government before it. Exiled editor of *La Prensa* Roberto Eisenmann describes the Noriega regime as "the world's first narco-military state," working like a mafia rather than a dictatorship. Eisenmann says that Noriega is in so tight with the Medellín cartel and other shady international interests that he can neither step down nor cede the slightest influence to the Panamanian people; this is not the sort of enterprise one "retires" from.

Like the mafia, this "thing" is highly diversified, cloaks itself in a number of legal financial and trading concerns,

and relies heavily on intimidation and rumor. Noriega is a rumor genius, and Panamanians are rumor-crazy. One Panama City businessman told me, "Tell Panamanian A that a friend is sick, and he'll tell Panamanian B that he's dead. Then Panamanian B will tell Panamanian C that he's seen the cadaver." It's not true that Noriega wrote a book on the art of spreading political rumors, but he did write a long and erudite white paper, or something resembling it, for the Torrijos regime. Noriega claims sixteen people died in the coup; the Panamanian opposition in Miami says between 112 and 116; my best Washington sources say between seventy and eighty. In the weeks after the coup, we were told that several of the participating officers had been taken down to the city morgue and frozen to death. True? No, although there was certainly plenty of torture. They just want you to know: *We do this stuff.*

Not that they do this stuff much, by Salvadoran or Colombian standards. Like the mafia, they work by examples, the most famous of which is Dr. Hugo Spadafora. Americans have pretty much forgotten his name since he was tortured and beheaded in October 1985, but Panamanians haven't. I heard him mentioned more often during the coup week than any of the coup conspirators; when Panama has its own currency, you'll see his face on coins. We probably hear so little of him in the United States because he fought for the *contras*.

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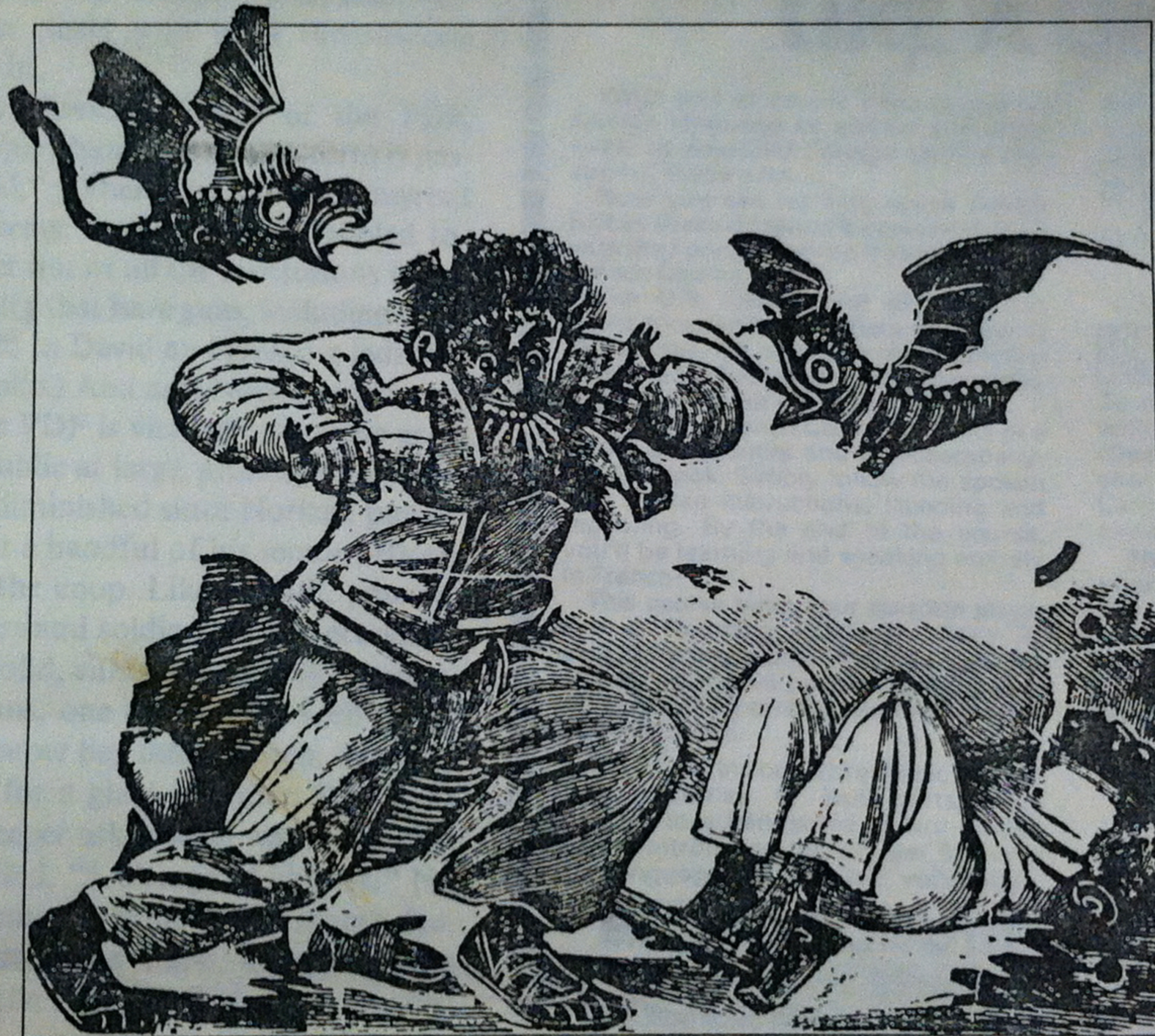
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most spectacular torture I have ever heard of.

It's a story that has been often repeated, but, as it is the beginning of the end for Noriega, and perhaps for Panama and the Panama Canal treaties, here it is again: the PDF started by working with sharp instruments on Spadafora's fingernails, moved on to a bit of truncheon-work that broke a few ribs, then used the truncheon for a long period on Spadafora's rectum. The high point of the torture involved some delicate and not-so-delicate work on his testicles. Since, as Spadafora's friend Guillermo Sanchez Borbon has written, "holding his legs open in a damp climate such as Panama's would be a messy, sweaty business," the PDF solved the problem by using a machete to sever the tendons in Spadafora's groin. They enjoyed a long, drunken torture orgy during which they dragged a battered Spadafora through a half-dozen Chiriqui beach towns before finally beheading him in Corozo. Then they drove his body back across the Costa Rican border and threw it into a ditch.

Sanchez Borbon has been eloquent on rape and its role in Panamanian politics. When he himself was arrested, he was told by his PDF guards that a dozen AIDS-infected prisoners would be brought in to rape him as soon as it got dark. He said that his greatest hope was that, being in his mid-sixties, he wouldn't appear such a tasty morsel to his potential rapists, but he had no doubt that the requisite homosexuals could, and would, be garnered. But Sanchez Borbon had friends who could make a big deal of this; they sprang him by nightfall and he is now in Miami. The Noriega regime is, weirdly, based on a rape. As a young lieutenant, Noriega raped a Peruvian prostitute and beat her to within an inch of her life. It was Torrijos's intervention that kept Noriega from being ousted from the army and consolidated Noriega's loyalty to, and favored status under, Torrijos.

Subtler forms of humiliation are used. Teachers, who as a class are particularly opposed to Noriega, are now getting visits from PDF officials who tell them they'd look nice in a sack at the bottom of the Canal. When Guillermo Endara, leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance, went on a hunger strike September 20, PDF troops spray-painted on the walls of his office: "Out to lunch . . . will be back soon!" (Endara is prodigiously fat.) Two days after the coup attempt, after Endara had given a press conference, the PDF raided opposition headquarters and spirited him out the back door. Endara was saved only because Spanish ambassador Tomas Lozano, who was watching from his office across the Par-

que Porras, called Noriega's office and said that if Endara were harmed there would be hell to pay from Spain and its European and American allies. It is a measure of the international consensus against Noriega that Lozano didn't consult any of those allies first.

Endara fled to the Vatican *nunciatura*, partly because it seemed like the only embassy Noriega wouldn't violate, and partly because there aren't that many ambassadors left to choose

from in Panama City, where, among American countries, only Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Ecuador recognize the government. Endara continued to issue statements, but he was slow and woozy after two weeks of fasting. Lying in bed with a copy of Gandhi's writings, in a country where *satyagraha* doesn't cut much ice, he looked rather a bozo. He stopped his hunger strike shortly thereafter.

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Yet Panamanians want Endara as their president, even though Panamanian presidents have had zero to say about the running of the country for the last few elections. Last May, despite Noriega candidate Carlos Duque's superior publicity and Noriega's attempt to buy out a second candidate to split the opposition, despite the fact that the Democratic Alliance had a shallow political platform aside from being anti-Noriega, the Endara/Ford/Arias Calderon ticket won by a three-to-one margin.

As Eisenmann says of the PDF, "People's hatred of that uniform is profound." (There are actually myriad uniforms, as the PDF is cobbled together out of all the institutions in the country that have guns, including bank guards in David and crossing ladies in Bambito.) And anti-Noriega sentiment in the PDF is virtually the same as in the public at large, although it's probably diminished since Noriega purged all but a handful of his senior officers after the coup. Like Girolodi, younger officers and soldiers aren't necessarily rock-solid, either. During 1987 demonstrations, one soldier was seen carrying a paper bag into a *tienda*, where he asked for a glass of water. When the shopkeeper asked what was in the bag, he replied, "A change of clothes." No one seemed to bring up the morale factor, but those most knowledgeable about the PDF think that the appear-

ance of one or two U.S. armored personnel carriers on the Transistmica last October would have led the PDF to lay down their arms. During the October crisis, *La Estrella de Panama*, like all papers pro-Noriega, was running AP bulletins out of Washington *uncut*. This is not such a big deal, as Panamanians don't read much: *La Estrella* is the largest paper in this country of 2.2 million, with a circulation of 15,000; the largest newspaper

General any less Our Bastard. There is no sentiment in Panama that the U.S. might be keeping Noriega in power as an excuse to abrogate the treaties (as one would expect in this rumor capital), but there is bafflement that the U.S. is not doing anything more to clean up the mess it helped make.

II

The strangest assortment of people pass through Panama: Paul Gauguin helped dig the Canal; the Shah spent some of his last days here; John Wayne married a Panamanian and visited often; and in the early 1960s Dame Margot Fonteyn, greatest of English ballerinas, staged a coup with her husband, Senator Roberto Arias, in a rowboat (a very Panamanian touch). But Panama's international flavor now comes from a pretty shady assortment of Libyan, Israeli, Taiwanese, and other money-launderers. It's still an excellent tax shelter. And, while most of the 80,000-100,000 Colombians who live in Panama are respectable businessmen, who do you think the guys with funny accents and \$6,000 alligator-skin boots are?

They're not the only imports of late—the Sandinista government recently sent a team of five election consultants, not of the Ailes/Squires variety, to Panama to ask how to rig Nicaraguan elections so that international observers wouldn't notice fraud to the extent that they did in Panama last May. Perhaps the February elections are appearing less and less likely, because even

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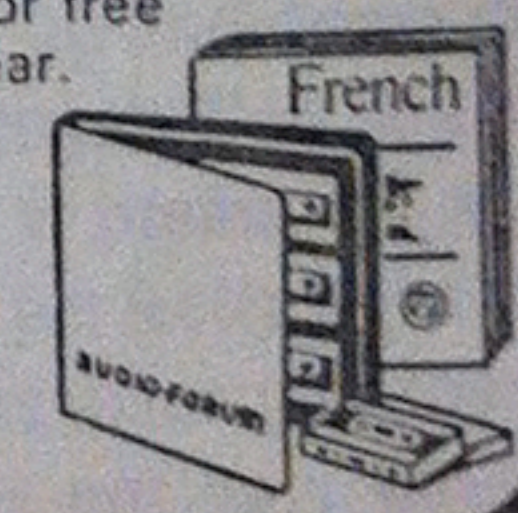
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most spectacular torture I have ever heard of.

It's a story that has been often repeated, but, as it is the beginning of the end for Noriega, and perhaps for Panama and the Panama Canal treaties, here it is again: the PDF started by working with sharp instruments on Spadafora's fingernails, moved on to a bit of truncheon-work that broke a few ribs, then used the truncheon for a long period on Spadafora's rectum. The high point of the torture involved some delicate and not-so-delicate work on his testicles. Since, as Spadafora's friend Guillermo Sanchez Borbon has written, "holding his legs open in a damp climate such as Panama's would be a messy, sweaty business," the PDF solved the problem by using a machete to sever the tendons in Spadafora's groin. They enjoyed a long, drunken torture orgy during which they dragged a battered Spadafora through a half-dozen Chiriqui beach towns before finally beheading him in Corozo. Then they drove his body back across the Costa Rican border and threw it into a ditch.

Sanchez Borbon has been eloquent on rape and its role in Panamanian politics. When he himself was arrested, he was told by his PDF guards that a dozen AIDS-infected prisoners would be brought in to rape him as soon as it got dark. He said that his greatest hope was that, being in his mid-sixties, he wouldn't appear such a tasty morsel to his potential rapists, but he had no doubt that the requisite homosexuals could, and would, be garnered. But Sanchez Borbon had friends who could make a big deal of this; they sprang him by nightfall and he is now in Miami. The Noriega regime is, weirdly, based on a rape. As a young lieutenant

que Porras, called Noriega's office and said that if Endara were harmed there would be hell to pay from Spain and its European and American allies. It is a measure of the international consensus against Noriega that Lozano didn't consult any of those allies first.

Endara fled to the Vatican *nunciatura*, partly because it seemed like the only embassy Noriega wouldn't violate, and partly because there aren't that many ambassadors left to choose

ance of one or two U.S. armored personnel carriers on the Transistmica last October would have led the PDF to lay down their arms.

During the October crisis, *La Estrella de Panama*, like all papers pro-Noriega, was running AP bulletins out of Washington *uncut*. This is not such a big deal, as Panamanians don't read much: *La Estrella* is the largest paper in this country of 2.2 million, with a circulation of 15,000; the largest newspaper

The General is often blitzed—Stolichnaya in the day, Old Parr at night—to the point where one associate describes him as functional about an hour a day.

from in Panama City, where, among American countries, only Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Ecuador recognize the government. Endara continued to issue statements, but he was slow and woozy after two weeks of fasting. Lying in bed with a copy of Gandhi's writings, in a country where *satyagraha* doesn't cut much ice, he looked rather a bozo. He stopped his hunger strike shortly thereafter.

Yet Panamanians want Endara as their president, even though Panamanian presidents have had zero to say about the running of the country for the last few elections. Last May, despite Noriega candidate Carlos Duque's superior publicity and Noriega's attempt to buy out a second candidate to split the opposition, despite the fact that the Democratic Alliance had a shallow political platform aside from being anti-

circulation ever recorded was 60,000-70,000 by *La Prensa* after the Spadafora killing. But Noriega didn't even black out U.S. television transmissions in October, as he did during the March 1988 protests, and it's not hard to see why. Administration officials were sounding dishonest, wimpish, incompetent, or all three. Secretary Baker was saying, "It's up to the Panamanian people to decide." From training Noriega in psychological operations at Fort Bragg to keeping him in the pay of the CIA well after his drug dealing was public knowledge, the United States has done a good deal of "deciding" for the Panamanian people. That these were errors of judgment rather than ill will does not make the

General any less Our Bastard. There is no sentiment in Panama that the U.S. might be keeping Noriega in power as an excuse to abrogate the treaties (as one would expect in this rumor capital), but there is bafflement that the U.S. is not doing anything more to clean up the mess it helped make.

II

The strangest assortment of people pass through Panama: Paul Gauguin helped dig the Canal; the Shah spent some of his last days here; John Wayne married a Panamanian and visited often; and in the early 1960s Dame Margot Fonteyn, greatest of English ballerinas, staged a coup with her husband, Senator Roberto Arias, in a rowboat (a very Panamanian touch). But Panama's international flavor now comes from a pretty shady assortment of Libyan, Israeli, Taiwanese, and other money-launderers. It's still an excellent tax shelter. And, while most of the 80,000-100,000 Colombians who live in Panama are respectable businessmen, who do you think the guys with funny accents and \$6,000 alligator-skin boots are?

They're not the only imports of late—the Sandinista government recently sent a team of five election consultants, not of the Ailes/Squires variety, to Panama to ask how to rig Nicaraguan elections so that international observers wouldn't notice fraud to the extent that they did in Panama last May. Perhaps the February elections are appearing less and less likely, because even

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Subtler forms of humiliation are used. Teachers, who as a class are particularly opposed to Noriega, are now getting visits from PDF officials who tell them they'd look nice in a sack at the bottom of the Canal. When Guillermo Endara, leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance, went on a hunger strike September 20, PDF troops spray-painted on the walls of his office: "Out to lunch . . . will be back soon!" (Endara is prodigiously fat.) Two days after the coup attempt, after Endara had given a press conference, the PDF raided opposition headquarters and spirited him out the back door. Endara was saved only because Spanish ambassador Tomas Lozano, who was watching from his office across the Par-

the government. Endara continued to issue statements, but he was slow and woozy after two weeks of fasting. Lying in bed with a copy of Gandhi's writings, in a country where *satyagraha* doesn't cut much ice, he looked rather a bozo. He stopped his hunger strike shortly thereafter.

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As Eisenmann says of the PDF, "People's hatred of that uniform is profound." (There are actually myriad uniforms, as the PDF is cobbled together out of all the institutions in the country that have guns, including bank guards in David and crossing ladies in Bambito.) And anti-Noriega sentiment in the PDF is virtually the same as in the public at large, although it's probably diminished since Noriega purged all but a handful of his senior officers after the coup. Like Girolodi, younger officers and soldiers aren't necessarily rock-solid, either. During 1987 demonstrations, one soldier was seen carrying a paper bag into a *tienda*, where he asked for a glass of water. When the shopkeeper asked what was in the bag, he replied, "A change of clothes." No one seemed to bring up the morale factor, but those most knowledgeable about the PDF think that the appear-

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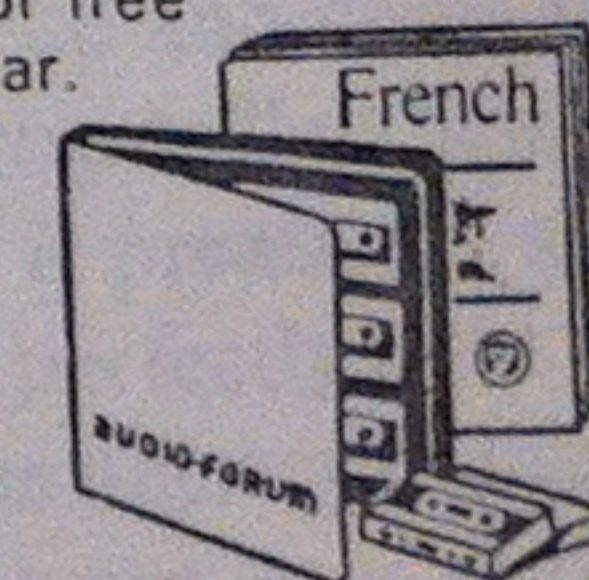
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Even Noriega's president, Francisco Rodriguez, is beginning to invoke Fidel and 1959, as he did at a pro-Noriega rally I attended at Paitilla Airport on Rodriguez's return from the U.N. Noriega had announced he would dis-

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Of course, none of this would keep anyone awake at night if it didn't involve the Panama Canal. We could talk all day about the sloppiness of the Canal treaties. For one, it's strange that President Carter chose Panama as his "proudest achievement," as the treaties weren't even his idea—the first treaty is merely the codification of a declaration signed by President Johnson and President Robles of Panama in 1965. For another, this is still Latin America, and, for all their gentleness, Panamanians respect respect more than kindness. Sanchez Borbon writes of Carter "mewing about Human Rights" while students got clubbed at a nearby university—where *clubbed* does not mean invited to join the Skull 'n' Bones. If the big payoff for the Canal treaties was to be the respect of Panamanians and other Latin Americans, then we lost.

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Still, breaking faith with a people who have done nothing to deserve it is unconscionable, and we must treat the Panama Canal as Panama's. Nations live by the things they're proudest of: Iceland has had only one armed robbery in its history, Ireland has never invaded another country, and the United States, for a world power, has broken treaties only under extraordinary circumstances. Hopping up and down saying, "Abrogate! Abrogate!" as Sen. Connie Mack is doing, is premature and distasteful, but he is perfectly right to bring attention to the urgency of the situation. The U.S. does not have until 1999 to sort out its plans—it has until about 1991.

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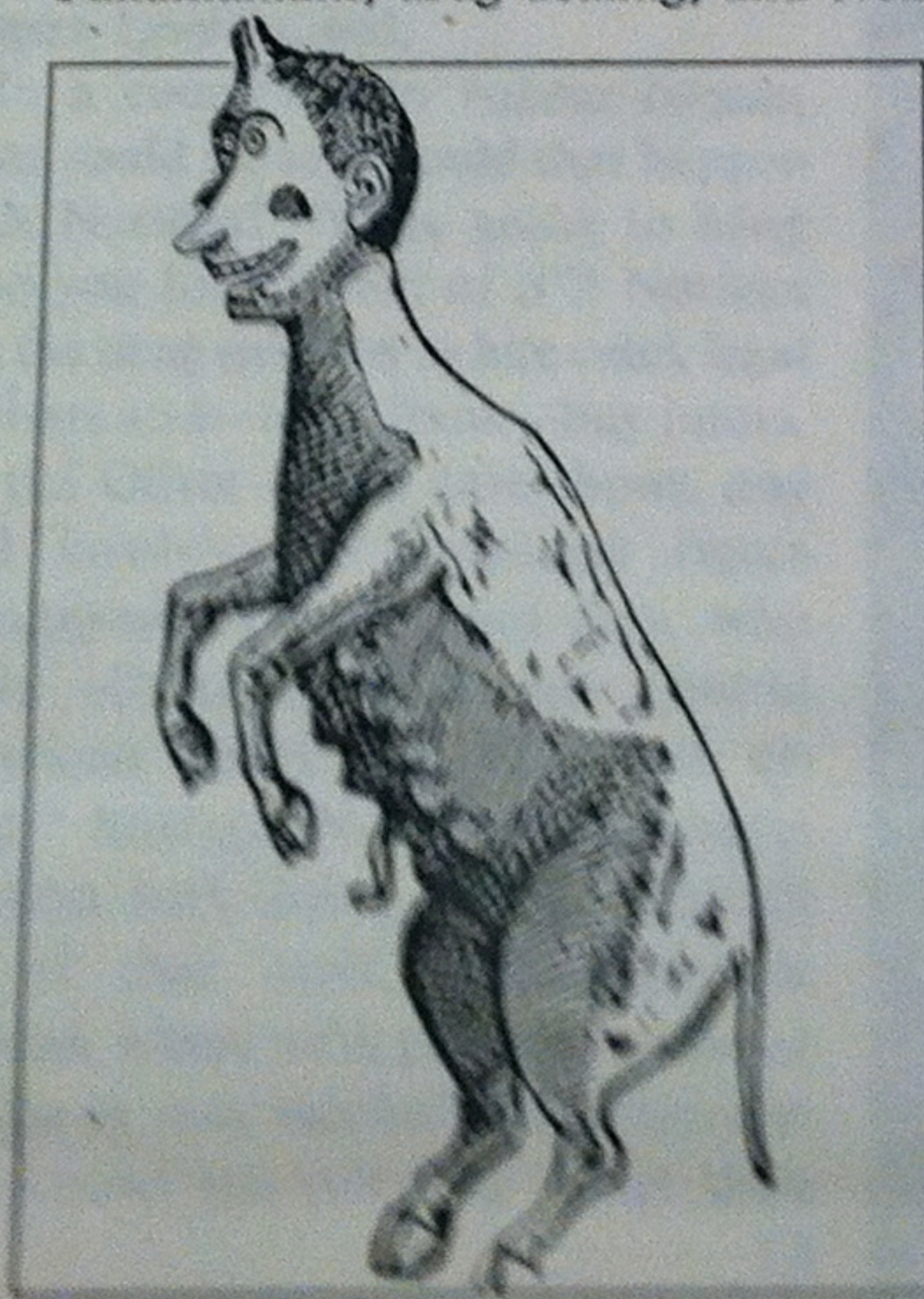
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Still, breaking faith with a people who have done nothing to deserve it is unconscionable, and we must treat the Panama Canal as Panama's. Nations live by the things they're proudest of: Iceland has had only one armed robbery in its history; Ireland has never invaded another country; and the United States, for a world power, has broken treaties only under extraordinary circumstances. Hopping up and down saying, "Abrogate! Abrogate!" as Sen. Connie Mack is doing, is premature and dishonest, but he is perfectly right to bring attention to the urgency of the situation. The U.S. does not have until 1990 to sort out its plans—it has until about 1988.

In January the Panama Canal Commission will get a Panamanian majority and a Panamanian head. Noriega is going to nominate publisher Tomas Altamirano, notwithstanding rumors that have appeared in the *New York Times* that the nominee will be Carlos Duque. Altamirano is said to be a capable man, but, as one administration official says, "It doesn't matter if he's the Virgin Mary—that nomination is dead in the water." In February, implementation of the Canal treaties will have been put on hold for the first time.

This will be the first balk in U.S. implementation of the Canal treaties, and the administration must now tread cautiously to keep the move from being misinterpreted in Latin America. American pressure must remain in a multinational context, preferably involving the Latin American alliance known as the Grupo de Ocho (rather, the Grupo de Siete, since the other states voted to expel Panama last October). This would supply an instant international mini-consensus, and squelch any talk of "gringo imperialism." A multinational approach will be vital if it becomes necessary for foreign troops to enter Panama, to guarantee fair elections, for example.

Any future U.S.-backed coup should involve a commitment on the part of the participants to four things: First, elections within a month. Panamanians are literally dying for fair elections, and Panama is not yet so poisoned that democracy is unviable. Second, a demand that the ballot include a plebiscite on the abolition of the PDF, which would pass by margins one associates only with black constituencies in American mayoral elections. Third, a blanket amnesty for all who have profited from the Noriega regime. If this sounds like the Bitburg defense, so be it. In a country of 2.2 million, where everyone knows each other by pet nicknames, it's easy to get someone to cave in to the regime by bringing up the subject of, say, his five-year-old daughter, and there are a lot of decent people caught up in this thing. Guaranteed amnesty would encourage Noriega cronies to jump ship, rather than defend the General under the presumption that their backs were to the wall. Finally, under no circumstances can Noriega remain in Panama.

This doesn't necessarily mean killing him. It could mean negotiating, using the Noriega indictments on drug charges, as was done during secret negotiations in April 1988. At that time, Spain came forward and told the State Department it would accept Noriega if something suitable could be arranged. Negotiations were painstaking. The deal arrived at was that

Noriega would go to Spain and keep all his money (which is in Europe, anyway). That Noriega eventually would have wound up in the Dominican Republic, where his son-in-law Jean Beauchamp is a successful French "businessman," is beside the point. The United States would drop the indictments.

Importantly, Noriega was to be allowed to stay in Panama for another month, so his departure would not be connected with the State Department talks—he was adamant that no one get the impression that he had left at the gringos' behest. But someone leaked. Some people say it was the State Department, which is preposterous—the team, led by Michael Kozak, had nothing to gain by it, and, given that Secretary Shultz was in Europe at the time, they did a spectacular job of arriving at a good deal. Whatever the case, the details of the secret agreement were leaked and, on April 29, 1988, the *Washington Post* ran a cover story elaborating the agreement in minute detail. Noriega panicked and pulled out. The State Department says privately that it is no longer remotely possible that they will drop the indictment ("This is a *was*, not an *is*," said one official). And the new guidelines for overthrow of foreign dictators are basically a matter of keeping Senate subcommittees from playing CIA.

A drawback to the drug indictment is the real possibility that Noriega could be acquitted. Lest this sound alarmist, consider the case of Roberto Suarez Levy, as reported by Guy Gugliotta and Jeff Leen in *Kings of Cocaine*. Suarez was arrested with 854 pounds of cocaine in Miami in 1981. His father, Roberto Suarez Gomez, who was Bolivia's largest raw cocaine producer and is now in jail for it in Bolivia, tried to cut an interesting deal—release my son and I'll pay off the Bolivian national debt. He needn't have bothered, as a Miami jury rejected the testimony of four DEA officers. Suarez Levy walked.

In a country with *habeas corpus*, what could we say should that happen with Noriega? "We're going to hang onto you for the hell of it"? Noriega has the drug millions to hire crack legal advisers and—to be frank—buy jurors. As the Oliver North case shows, any trial involving a prominent figure presupposes a brain-dead jury, who could effectively hold our Central American policy and our "war on drugs" hostage. Not that the administration isn't doing a good enough job of that itself, particularly in Panama, where we're playing a game of *¿Quien es mas macho?* with someone who knows the rules far better than we. □

SARKES TARZIA

WRCB, CHANNEL 3, CH

KTVN, CHANNEL 3

WTTS, 92.3 FM, BLOC

WGCL, 1370 AM, BLO

WAJI, 95.1 FM, FO

CENTRAL OFFICE, BOX 62, BL
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Providing the Best Race

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Charges unsealed in drugs case

LOS ANGELES - Federal prosecutors yesterday unsealed two indictments against a Bolivian immigrant reputed to rival leaders of the Colombian cocaine cartels. Julius C. Beretta, DEA special agent in San Diego, described Jorge Roca Suarez as "one of the most significant cocaine traffickers in the United States, on par with Medellin or Cali cartel leaders." Roca, his wife, Cirila Roca, his sisters, Beatriz Roca Torres and Vilma Roca, and two others were brought to federal court, but their arraignments were postponed while they hire lawyers. Roca was arrested Thursday. One indictment charges the defendants with an array of tax evasion, money laundering and fraud offenses. The other charges cocaine smuggling, conspiracy and related crimes. (AP)

THE WASHINGTON POST

WORLD NEWS

DEA Suspends Raids In Peru, Bonner Says

Interference by Local Military Blamed

By Michael Isikoff
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Drug Enforcement Administration was forced to suspend its operations in Peru earlier this month as a result of interference from the Peruvian armed forces, DEA chief Robert C. Bonner said yesterday.

He said that the agency's anti-drug raids would not be resumed in the Andean nation until U.S. officials are satisfied that "we can conduct operations effectively." But a U.S. Embassy spokesman in the Peruvian capital of Lima said raids had resumed in recent days at "a reduced level."

The decision to suspend U.S. operations was made by Peruvian police with DEA concurrence follow-

ing a recent incident in Peru's prime coca-growing region where Peruvian soldiers blocked a team of Peruvian police and DEA agents from entering a building suspected of containing a large cache of semi-processed cocaine.

Other U.S. officials said that as a result of that and other recent developments, the State Department is now seriously considering "decertifying" Peru as a country cooperating with U.S. anti-drug efforts. Such a move would cut off most U.S. aid to Peru and require the United States to vote against any loans for Peru in the International Monetary Fund and other international institutions.

The development is a potentially damaging setback to U.S. hopes of

See DEA, A27, Col. 1



FABIO OCHOA VASQUEZ
... linked to murder of DEA informant

Top Cocaine Trafficker Surrenders in Colombia

Government Decree Bars U.S. Extradition

By Douglas Farah
Special to The Washington Post

BOGOTA, Colombia, Dec. 18—Fabio Ochoa Vasquez, under indictment in the United States for drug trafficking and planning the murder of a key Drug Enforcement Administration informant, today surrendered to Colombian authorities under a government decree guaranteeing he will not be extradited to the United States.

Ochoa, 33, and two older brothers are on the DEA's list of 12 most-wanted Colombian cocaine traffickers, and he is a reputed leader of the Medellin drug cartel. As part of the government decree, he is to receive reduced sentences for any crimes to which he confesses.

Ochoa faces no criminal charges

in Colombia but is under a U.S. federal grand jury indictment United States for helping smuggle an estimated \$1 billion worth of cocaine into the country and for planning the 1986 murder of DEA informant Barry Seal.

"The government is very satisfied that the decree . . . is producing all the effects we wanted it to," President Cesar Gaviria told reporters following the announcement. "The decree was to allow delinquents to submit to Colombian justice."

Ochoa, allegedly one of the pioneers of large-scale cocaine trafficking to the United States, is the first prominent trafficker to turn himself in since a Sept. 5 announcement by Gaviria offering incentives to traffickers who surrender. Five

See COLOMBIA, A27, Col. 1

D.E.A. / Drugs and Drug Enforcement

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PRIIO/DE-06

THE WASHINGTON POST

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Washington Post
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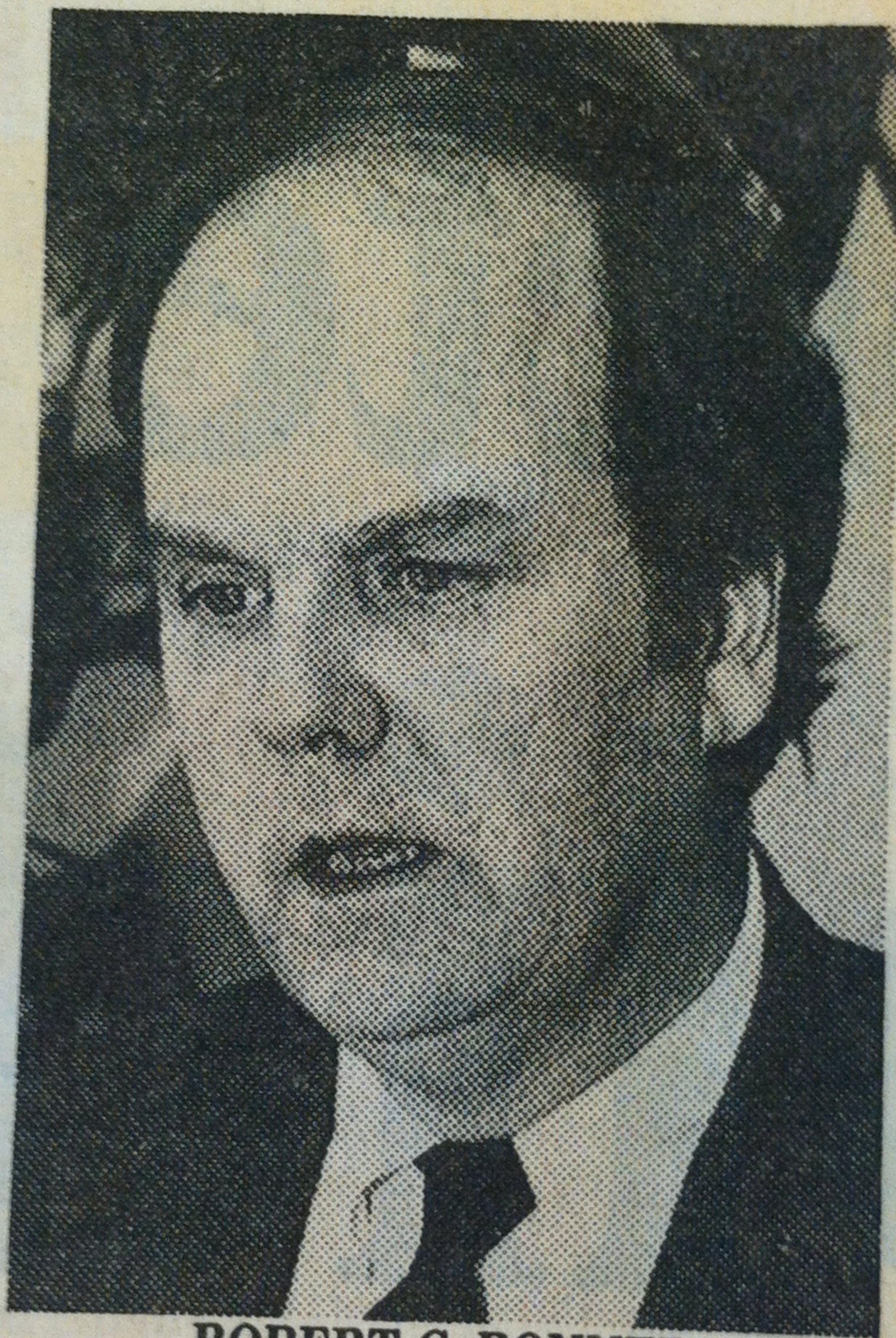
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From A25

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ROBERT C. BONNER

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Last month, U.S. officials received new intelligence reports that senior Peruvian military commanders had tipped off

DEA Raids In Peru Are Suspended

DEA, From A25

curtailing the drug trade in Peru, whose farmers grow coca for more than half the cocaine entering the United States. In recent months, U.S. officials said, Peru's coca crop has jumped to unprecedented levels, and local trafficking of coca leaves and semi-processed coca paste surged dramatically after a temporary disruption earlier this year.

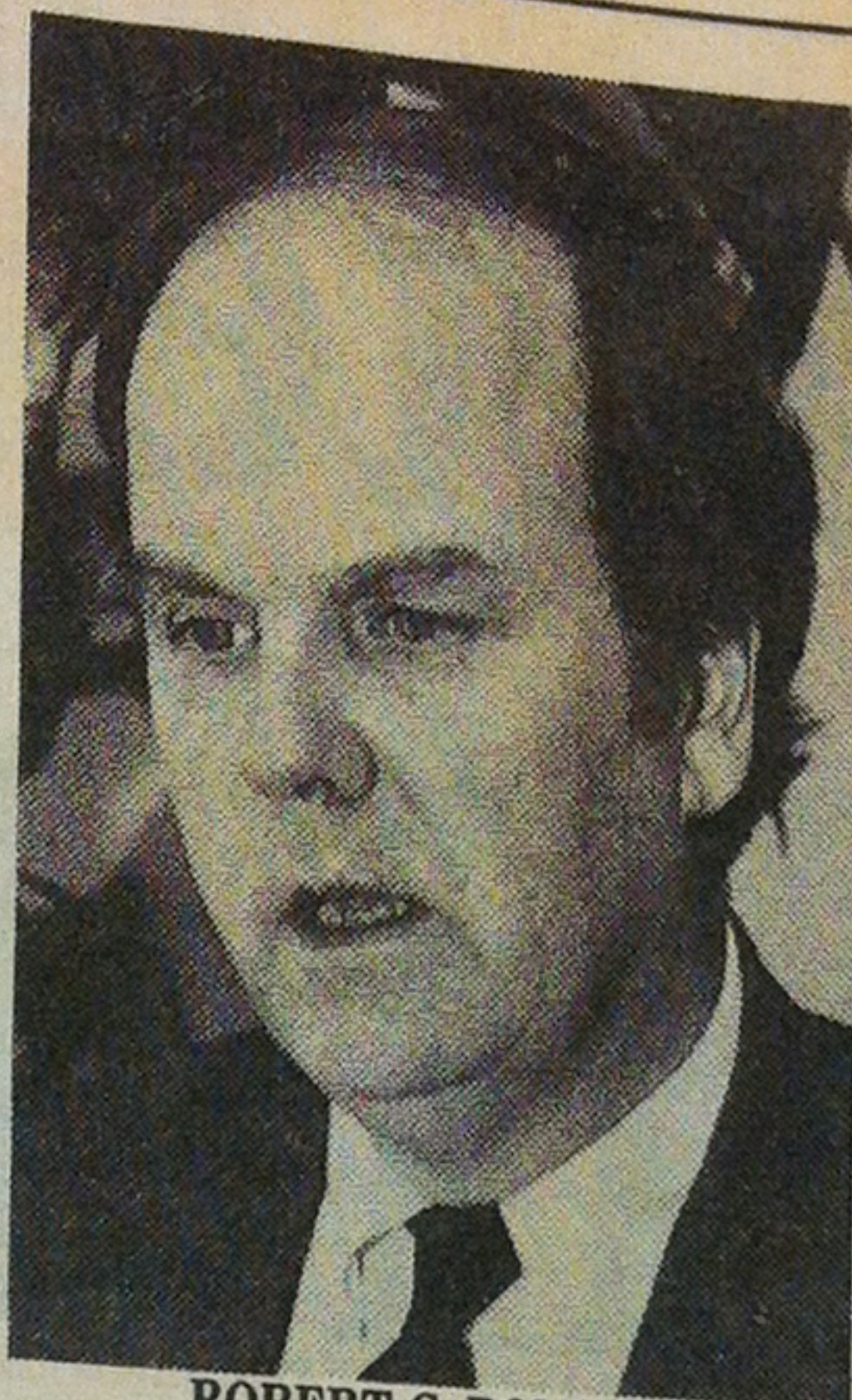
Bonner said yesterday that the Nov. 30 incident in Sion, a village in an Andean mountain valley 350 miles northeast of Lima, was "symptomatic" of problems that long have impeded DEA operations in Peru. Among them were "indications" that Peruvian military officials were selling information about upcoming DEA raids to drug traffickers in the coca-growing Upper Huallaga Valley, he said.

Bonner referred to the suspension of operations as a temporary "stand-down" and added, "We'd like to see some sign it's going to be possible to conduct operations effectively."

DEA spokesman Frank Shults said later that Bonner was not "issuing an ultimatum" to the Peruvian government. Other U.S. officials said one team of DEA agents had left Peru earlier this month in a normal rotation for the holiday season, and a new team will be dispatched to the Upper Huallaga Valley in mid-January. Any future operational decisions will depend on the Peruvian police as well as an overall assessment of DEA activities worldwide, Shults said.

The security of DEA agents in Peru has been a thorny issue for some time because the jungle-like Upper Huallaga is also a stronghold of the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas. Last year, the State Department spent \$1.2 million to build a heavily fortified outpost in the village of Santa Lucia to be used as a staging ground for helicopter raids by DEA agents and Peruvian police.

For the past year, rotating teams



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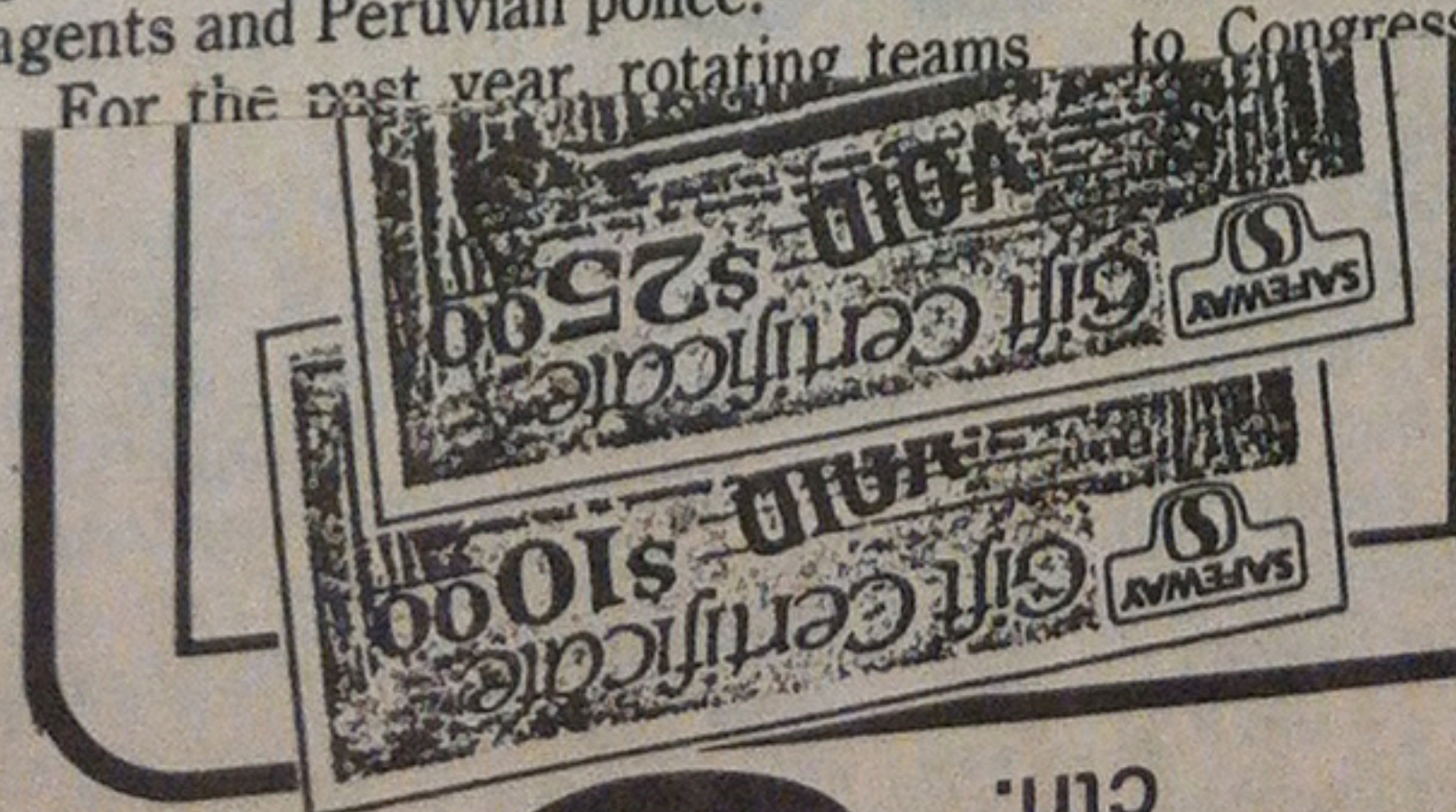
Last month, U.S. officials received new intelligence reports that senior Peruvian military commanders had tipped off drug traffickers to one series of DEA raids at a meeting in the village of Uchiza.

Bonner said yesterday he wants an end to the requirement for such a long advance notice. "My first and foremost concern is that it potentially endangers DEA agents that may literally walk into some trap or setup," he said. "Secondly, and more likely," he said, is the prospect that targeted drug processing laboratories may be "shut down" by the time DEA agents arrive.

The concerns came to a head Nov. 30 in the village of Sion when a team of DEA agents and Peruvian police sought to enter an eight-room building agents believed hid a cache of more than 1,000 pounds of semi-processed cocaine base. A military contingent of 20 to 25 Peruvian soldiers blocked the agents from entering for about 15 minutes, and when the agents entered, most of the cocaine base had been removed.

A State Department official said yesterday that the soldiers' interference was part of a "repeated pattern of incidents" in which the Peruvian armed forces have thwarted DEA operations and prompted new concerns about Peru's status in the State Department's annual report to Congress next month on inter-

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Judge Frees Drug Trafficker Under Colombia's New Rules

U.S. Willingness to Share Evidence Is Imperiled

By Douglas Farah
Special to The Washington Post

BOGOTA, Colombia, Jan. 21—The first drug trafficker to surrender under President Cesar Gaviria's promise of nonextradition has been released from prison by a judge after less than two months, raising questions about the Colombian judicial system's ability to punish powerful traffickers.

The ruling was made Jan. 11 but not made public until today, when the government announced it would appeal and would charge the judge with the felony of "willful and knowing violation" of the law.

Freeing of the convicted Gonzalo Mejia stunned federal officials, who called it illegal and said it could seriously undermine Gaviria's policy here and abroad. They voiced fears that it also could limit international cooperation in the cases of two of the world's most powerful drug traffickers, brothers Fabio and Jorge Luis Ochoa, the reputed leaders of the Medellin cocaine cartel, who turned themselves in under the same government policy.

"The government is worried, because, obviously, it affects the credibility of our policy," said a senior official today. "We acknowledge there is a problem, and we are doing everything we can to correct it."

Attorney General Carlos Gustavo Arrieta said he was bringing criminal charges against the judge who, he said, illegally paroled Mejia. Under indictment in Florida, Mejia confessed to five counts of cocaine trafficking, but served only 44 days of his three-year prison sentence. Under Colombian law, those jailed for drug trafficking are not eligible for parole.

The judge, Aristides Betancur, resigned his post last week after granting Mejia parole. A source monitoring the government investigation said there was no evidence that the judge had been bribed but speculated that he may have felt his life to be at risk if he kept Mejia in jail. The drug cartels repeatedly have intimidated, bribed or killed judges who stood in their way.

"We are enormously concerned because this is not in line with the purposes of the government policy and can be seen as a mockery of justice that has a negative impact on the process," Arrieta said in a press conference.

Mejia, described by the official as a "middleman in a mid-sized organization," initially was sentenced to six years in prison, the minimum time for drug trafficking. His sentence was reduced by half because of his confession, and because he turned over \$60,000 in cash and a pick-up truck.

In September, Gaviria promised that traffickers who turned themselves in and confessed to a crime would not be extradited to face charges in the United States and would receive reduced sentences.

The policy has won broad support in Colombia and parts of the U.S. government, but national and international law enforcement officials have expressed skepticism that Colombia can effectively try and punish the traffickers.

Of special concern is whether traffickers who surrender will receive punishments that fit their crimes, and Gaviria says his policy will only work, and the criminals only receive stiff sentences, if the United States and other countries turn over their evidence to Colombian authorities.

This is especially true in the case of the Ochoa brothers. While both are listed as among the U.S. list of 12 most wanted traffickers, Fabio faces no criminal charges in Colombia and Jorge Luis faces only minor charges. The latter has been arrested twice, and both times managed to slip away, once under circumstances almost identical to that of Mejia's parole.

But the evidence-sharing plan has hit serious snags, which the Mejia case are likely to exacerbate.

U.S. and European narcotics experts fear that if they turn over all their evidence and it is improperly used or the Ochoas were suddenly freed, the evidence could not be used again in future trials because that would mean trying the person twice for the same crimes.

Use of some evidence could also damage other cases where several people are tried for the same crime, the officials said.

"The double-jeopardy issue is a serious concern," said a U.S. narcotics expert working with the Colombians. "Initially, the Colombians thought we would just take a wheelbarrow and give them everything we have," he said. "Neither side was aware of how complex this would be."

D.E.A. / Drugs and Drug Enforcement

PR/IO/DE-08

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THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1991

Report Says Mercenaries Aided Colombian Cartels

By JEFF GERTH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 — Groups of British and Israeli mercenaries provided paramilitary assistance to Colombian drug-trafficking organizations in 1988 and 1989, according to a Senate staff study and testimony presented today to a Senate panel.

The staff of the panel, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, has also found that a large shipment of Israeli arms that wound up with Colombian traffickers in 1989 was arranged and financed with the help of three former Israeli military officials who laundered payments for the weap-

ons through a Panamanian bank in 1989.

The two cases were discussed today by the subcommittee as part of its long-standing effort to examine ties between illegal arms sales, mercenaries and drug cartels.

Subcommittee members said the examples cited today showed that more government vigilance and cooperation at home and abroad were needed to stop trafficking in arms and paramilitary expertise.

"The international arms market for conventional weaponry too often resembles a multinational bazaar," said Senator William V. Roth Jr. of

Delaware, the ranking Republican on the panel, who called for better efforts to limit global arms trafficking.

The hearing today included testimony about a group of British mercenaries who in 1988 provided training for private armies controlled by José Rodríguez Gacha, a drug-trafficking leader who was killed in late 1989 by the Colombian police.

David Tomkins, identified by the subcommittee as a leader of the mercenary group, told the panel that he and his associates worked closely with some senior Colombian military officials in the effort, which was not approved by the Colombian Government.

Mr. Tomkins said the Colombian military officials forged a financial and political alliance with the drug traffickers in order to combat leftist insurgents. Mr. Tomkins justified his association with the notorious drug gangs by citing the need to fight the insurgents.

Mr. Tomkins, described by the subcommittee staff as a safecracker and explosive expert turned mercenary, told the senators that he had worked previously in Angola, Rhodesia and Afghanistan before going to Colombia, where he was paid \$2,000 a week for his services.

A subcommittee staff aide told the panel that the training offered to drug dealers by the British and Israeli groups included terrorist tactics, like detonating car bombs.

Mr. Tomkins said one arms shipment he helped arrange for the Colom-

bian traffickers eventually grew to more than 50 tons.

The Israeli group that provided paramilitary training for Colombian trafficking forces was headed by Yair G. Klein, who retired in 1981 as an Israeli military officer and set up a security firm called Spearhead, according to a report by the subcommittee's minority staff. That report is scheduled to be discussed at a hearing Thursday.

Mr. Klein has said he thought he was helping Colombian ranchers defend themselves, but Senator Roth said that evidence and testimony developed by the subcommittee made such explanations "not credible."

Mr. Klein declined to speak with a reporter today.

Mr. Klein's involvement in a 1989 shipment of Israeli arms, ostensibly intended for Antigua but which wound up

on Mr. Rodríguez Gacha's ranch, has been investigated by the subcommittee and a judicial panel in Antigua.

The subcommittee, after gaining access to bank records, found that "the money for both the down payment and the final payment for these weapons originated or passed through Klein's Spearhead account in the Banco-Aleman Danemeno in Panama City," the minority staff study said.

The staff study cited circumstantial evidence that some of the funds used by Mr. Klein to buy the weapons ultimately originated in Colombia, but it couldn't fully trace the flow of money through Panama due to "obfuscation and delay" by Panamanian officials.

Ana Lisa Mir, a spokeswoman at the Panamanian Embassy in Washington, declined to comment on the staff report.

D.E.A. / Drugs and Drug Enforcement

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THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL

Report Says Mercenaries Aided Colombian Cartels

By JEFF GERTH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 — Groups of British and Israeli mercenaries provided paramilitary assistance to Colombian drug-trafficking organizations in 1988 and 1989, according to a Senate staff study and testimony presented today to a Senate panel.

The staff of the panel, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, has also found that a large shipment of Israeli arms that wound up with Colombian traffickers in 1989 was arranged and financed with the help of three former Israeli military officials who laundered payments for the weap-

ons through a Panamanian bank in 1989.

The two cases were discussed today by the subcommittee as part of its long-standing effort to examine ties between illegal arms sales, mercenaries and drug cartels.

Subcommittee members said the examples cited today showed that more government vigilance and cooperation at home and abroad were needed to stop trafficking in arms and paramilitary expertise.

"The international arms market for conventional weaponry too often resembles a multinational bazaar," said Senator William V. Roth Jr. of

Delaware, the ranking Republican on the panel, who called for better efforts to limit global arms trafficking.

The hearing today included testimony about a group of British mercenaries who in 1988 provided training for private armies controlled by José Rodríguez Gacha, a drug-trafficking leader who was killed in late 1989 by the Colombian police.

David Tomkins, identified by the subcommittee as a leader of the mercenary group, told the panel that he and his associates worked closely with some senior Colombian military officials in the effort, which was not approved by the Colombian Government.

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Mr. Tomkins said the Colombian military officials forged a financial and political alliance with the drug traffickers in order to combat leftist insurgents. Mr. Tomkins justified his association with the notorious drug gangs by citing the need to fight the insurgents.

Mr. Tomkins, described by the subcommittee staff as a safecracker and explosive expert turned mercenary, told the senators that he had worked previously in Angola, Rhodesia and Afghanistan before going to Colombia, where he was paid \$2,000 a week for his services.

A subcommittee staff aide told the panel that the training offered to drug dealers by the British and Israeli groups included terrorist tactics, like detonating car bombs.

Mr. Tomkins said one arms shipment he helped arrange for the Colom-

bian traffickers eventually grew to more than 50 tons.

The Israeli group that provided paramilitary training for Colombian trafficking forces was headed by Yair G. Klein, who retired in 1981 as an Israeli military officer and set up a security firm called Spearhead, according to a report by the subcommittee's minority staff. That report is scheduled to be discussed at a hearing Thursday.

Mr. Klein has said he thought he was helping Colombian ranchers defend themselves, but Senator Roth said that evidence and testimony developed by the subcommittee made such explanations "not credible."

Mr. Klein declined to speak with a reporter today.

Mr. Klein's involvement in a 1989 shipment of Israeli arms, ostensibly intended for Antigua but which wound up

on Mr. Rodríguez Gacha's ranch, has been investigated by the subcommittee and a judicial panel in Antigua.

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PR/IO/DE-09

JACK ANDERSON and DALE VAN ATTA

Pressure Builds on Customs Service

Investigators for Congress and the Treasury Department are closing in on the Customs Service, and the day of reckoning is coming for Customs employees who have been dodging charges of internal corruption.

We have been tracking the investigations being done by a House subcommittee and the Treasury Department's inspector general. They are looking into charges that the Customs internal affairs department, which is supposed to police corruption in the agency, doesn't when friends are involved.

In February we reported that customs employees across Texas had turned over thousands of pages of documents to the internal affairs department. Those documents listed alarming allegations, from misuse of government funds to outright fraternization between customs agents and drug dealers in the Southwest. And these are the people at the front line of defense in the war on drugs. Many of those named in the documents held management positions. Internal affairs pulled its punches; the whistle-blowers were harassed.

One management official whose name turned up in the whistle-blowers' documents had already been investigated three times by the Treasury inspector general at his previous Customs post. Each time the allegations were substantiated. Twice, as "punishment," he was transferred to jobs that amounted to lateral moves.

Rep. Doug Barnard Jr. (D-Ga.), chairman of the House subcommittee that oversees Customs, didn't pull his punches when he sent a letter of warning recently to Customs Commissioner Carol Hallett. He cited an affidavit from a Texas customs agent

who was told by his supervisor: "As long as the commissioner does not know that internal affairs is corrupt, she will continue to use them . . . since she has no choice in the matter. . . . They are all she has to rely on to conduct her investigation."

Hallett has been on the job for almost two years. Several customs employees told our associate Dean Boyd that they think Hallett wants to get to the bottom of the mess, but they suspect she is being shielded from the worst of it by subordinates.

But with Congress and the Treasury Department now doing independent investigations, some in Customs are beginning to sweat because they can't pull the strings anymore.

Problems with internal affairs are not new to Customs. In 1989 the General Accounting Office issued a report saying there was no guarantee that a claim about corruption in Customs "would receive proper consideration."

The report included one of the most unsettling examples of internal affairs in action. In July 1987, internal affairs was told someone from Customs may have broken into the GAO offices and stolen files while the GAO was investigating Customs. Internal affairs did not investigate. Months later an anonymous tipster called the Treasury Department and repeated the claim. Treasury verified that it had happened, but the burglars, who turned out to be internal affairs agents, were given a slap on the wrist.

A former Senate investigator said: "It shows you the cavalier mind-set of some of these guys. I don't know about now, but back then the office of internal affairs was an unmitigated disaster."